

Taylor (R. W.)

An Address delivered to the  
Graduating Class of the  
Charity Hospital Train-  
ing School for Nurses,

*October 12, 1887.*

BY

ROBERT W. TAYLOR, M. D.,

SURGEON TO THE HOSPITAL.

REPRINTED FROM

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THE managers of the Training School have requested me, as a member of the medical board of this hospital, to say a few appropriate words to you upon this the day of your graduation. Before entering upon the train of thought which the occasion suggests to my mind, I am impelled to speak of the conditions under which you receive your diploma from this Training School. For many reasons you should be thankful for your good fortune, which has been greater than that of any of your predecessors. You entered the school when it was no longer in its infancy, but in its full maturity, its various systems perfected, its routines of teaching greatly increased and systematized, and its whole *régime* brought to a status which, as an institute of learning, study, and experience in the care of the sick, makes it a power in the land. Under the able and efficient guidance of the Board of Managers of this school, and under

\* Published by request of the Board of Managers of the Training School.



the fostering care and unremitting energy of its chairman, with the hearty co-operation of the superintendent, all this good work has been accomplished. Such is the rigid scrutiny which is now exercised in accepting a nurse that those chosen may well be thankful and proud. I think I may say, without fear of contradiction, that in no other school in this country are nurses so thoroughly taught, not only in general medicine and surgery, but also in the Maternity Hospital, in the uterine wards, in the eye, ear, and throat services, and in the care of children. Such a curriculum commands all praise, and those who have pursued it successfully are certainly to be envied.

And, fortunate as you are in this thoroughness of your course of training, you have reason to be doubly thankful for the watchful care which has been exercised in the interest of your health, comfort, recreation, and general well-being. Among the very many wise and beneficent acts of the honorable Board of Commissioners the one which gives the nurses a separate spacious home appeals to the heart in enthusiasm and to the head in its kindness and wisdom. There you have had well-furnished, well-ventilated, and ample apartments. There you have had a bright, cheery home, which impresses one who enters it with a sense of refinement, happiness, and comfort. Then, as a relief to the arduousness of your duties, means of recreation have been provided in the cozy parlor, with its various interesting games and its library and musical instruments, while outside on the lawn you have been able to enjoy tennis, croquet, and other healthful exercises, and, last but not least, the opportunity for salt-water bathing and swimming has been provided for you. Providence has certainly smiled upon you, and, while your senses have been trained and your intellects expanded by the course of study, your bodily health and comfort have been carefully looked after.

Having now passed through the required period of training and study, and having acquitted yourselves worthily at the final examination, it remains for the officers of the school to present to you your diplomas, as signs and seals of your worthiness and fitness as nurses.

With your diplomas you enter upon a serious, perhaps the most serious, epoch in your life ; from this time on you must fight the battle of life alone and unaided, and you will stand or fall according as you prove yourselves equal to the occasion. While students you have been sheltered within the protective arms of this great institution ; here you have been guarded by a jealous care and treated with kindly forbearance ; here any errors which you may have made have been among friends, associates, and sympathizers ; here you have those to whom you may go for advice and encouragement, and your duties are largely routine. Beyond these walls all this will be changed. You enter the household of the sick as a stranger ready to perform delicate and arduous duties. There you have to maintain your position and acquit yourself with credit and to the satisfaction of the sick persons and the relatives and friends, who may or may not be kindly and forbearing, and very often censorious, exacting, and even unreasonable, and who certainly will not overlook errors in acts or judgment, condone oversights, or extenuate breaches, however small, of deportment, speech, or manners. The duties, instead of being routine, will be varied, changing, and unexpected. In none of the walks of life do I know of a more delicate position, nor one which requires more prudence, self-balance, tact, common sense, foresight, and presence of mind than that of a nurse thus thrown upon her own resources.

The fortitude which has been shown by women in assuming such delicate and arduous duties, and the zeal and singleness of purpose which have characterized them in

their performance, happily have had their due weight with the world, and the trained nurse is now generally received with confidence, respect, and honor. This feeling of confidence and appreciation, I am happy to say, is to-day deeply rooted in the minds of the people, and is rapidly extending to all communities. It is pleasant to contemplate the position she holds in the hearts of the people. Friends of patients are often heard to say with much confidence that, besides the experienced physician, they have a trained nurse, and their manner convinces you that they think all is well, and that all that can be will be done. I regret that I can not leave this general statement in an unqualified manner, and that I can not say that there are not those who do not entertain such gratifying views as to the value of the trained nurse. It will be for your benefit to know the adverse criticisms made upon your fellows, since they contain subjects for deep reflection on your part. The London "Lancet," whose great influence you all know, in an editorial on trained nurses thus speaks: "As we have more than once pointed out in these columns, there is a class of trained nurses which must be regarded as one specially developed or evolved by the practical ignorance of details in respect to the needs of the sick-chamber, who have obtained all the bedside knowledge they possess at hospitals, without being inducted personally to their work as attendants on private families. We hold, and do not hesitate to affirm, that attendance on the practice of a hospital is not in itself a sufficient preparation for the treatment of patients in their homes. What nurses are trained to do could be as well done by ordinary servants if the practitioner would and could give precise instructions as to details. As matters stand, the sick are often at the mercy of a class of women who have been taught a system not good in itself, and wholly unsuited to the need of the majority of patients,

and who are puffed up with a little knowledge to an extent dangerous to those poor sick folk over whom they usurp and exercise an authority which is irrational and mischievous. They are happy who have wives, sisters, or even servants to tend them in their hour of helplessness, and who are not under the care of a nurse who stands between doctor and patient to the injury of both."

Under the title "Post-graduation Hints to Nurses" we find an editorial in a recent number of the able and conservative "New York Medical Journal," which contains the following: "What the ordinary graduate of a nurse's training school most needs when she emerges from the hospital, and undertakes private nursing, is to have her technical training supplemented, and perhaps to some extent rectified, by sound advice on the ethical and prudential aspects of her calling. For lack of this, many a woman has made herself a nuisance in place of a treasure among those who have been unlucky enough to employ her. The time is rapidly approaching when these women of excellent attainments will be forced by competition either to train themselves anew, or give way to their better-advised rivals."

I am not of the belief that hospital training does not properly fit a young woman for private nursing, nor do I think that, as a rule, servants make good nurses, even when the physician has time to teach them, and further think that, in general, relatives and friends are not efficient in the sick-room for obvious reasons. The gravamen of the "Lancet's" remarks, however, is to the effect that nurses become puffed up with a little knowledge, and that they exert an irrational and mischievous authority over their patients. Those who have attentively read the remarks of the "Lancet" must draw the conclusion that they emanate from an experience other than happy with trained nurses, in which, undoubtedly, the latter acted foolishly, without thought and

judgment. In the editorial in the "New York Medical Journal" the thoroughness of the hospital training is not called in question, but it is clearly shown that the student curriculum should be supplemented by sound advice on the ethical and prudential aspects of your calling. As I look back I can recall many nurses who have impressed me with their unfitness, and others again, I am happy to say, who have proved themselves to be born nurses. Let me briefly sketch some of the characteristics of nurses who have in my experience—and I am sure others have met with them—presented objectionable qualities.

First, the gossiping nurse. She is usually bright, alert, and prompt in her duties, but takes every chance to gossip with the patient, when strong enough, and with the members of the family, and, I am sorry to say, with the servants. In this way she gets many of the family secrets, sees many a skeleton in the closet, and in most instances comes to know by heart the whole genealogy of the family. With this choice budget she often comes in a confidential manner to the doctor or to acquaintances, and most undoubtedly retails it in the bosom of the next family in which she is engaged. It is needless to say that after a time her sphere of usefulness or uselessness is very limited.

Then there is the hyper-sympathetic nurse. In some the effusiveness is due to an emotional nature, in others it is assumed under the delusion that such a course will more thoroughly ingratiate her with the family. She applies the most endearing epithets to the sick person, and also to the female members of the family, particularly to old ladies. Any increase in the patient's suffering calls forth a flood of endearments, and in the event of a crisis in the case, all of the members of the family come in for a full share. She is always moved to pity, and with children her sympathy seemingly borders on grief. Such a nurse is usually not efficient,

prompt, and reliable. Instead of being guided by common sense, she is controlled by her emotions.

Then we have what may be called the reminiscent nurse. Her failing is in being absorbed with a most exalted idea of and a great gratitude to the physician who recommended her. She is usually bright and in most respects efficient. But before she has been installed in her position twenty-four hours she will have told all about Mrs. Brown's last accouchement and what wonders the doctor accomplished. Then during the latter's visit to his patient she will see and suggest some point of resemblance in the symptoms or course to those of Mrs. Jones, whom she and he had previously cared for and who was miraculously saved ; or, perhaps, with a tender cadence of the voice she will ask whether you have seen or heard lately of Mrs. Robinson's child who was once at death's door and saved as if by a miracle. And thus she goes on her way, repeating these lugubrious histories, to the annoyance of the family and to the disgust of the doctor.

The officious nurse is also not infrequently met with, and her objectionable qualities have their origin in a mistaken idea of performing her duties in a most thorough manner. She aims at a high mark and overreaches herself. She is always on the move, bustling, fussy, and so attentive to her patient that often she is importunate and even annoying ; while to the doctor, whom she waylays and stops on every possible occasion, she makes suggestions, dilates on trivial matters, discusses in many words symptoms, signs, and treatment, till he wishes that she was far away. Such a nurse usually fritters her time away in trifles and does her duty in an unsatisfactory manner. She is soon dropped from the physician's list.

In marked contrast to the officious nurse is the diffident, timidous nurse. Such a nurse lacks self-confidence ; she is

timid in speech and action, and appears awkward and often not bright. She is usually willing and industrious, but her shortcomings of nature weigh her down and act as a bar to her success. Such a nurse should be treated by the physician with much consideration, should be aided by kindly words of advice, and stimulated by evidences of interest in order to help her to overcome her natural infirmity.

Finally, among the objectionable classes of nurses there is the self-opinionated nurse, or the one who thinks that she knows everything. It is this kind of a nurse which has called forth the strong language used in the London "Lancet," and who is to be found, I am glad to say, only infrequently on this side of the Atlantic. She is usually exacting, unsympathetic, even cold in her manner. She goes about her duties in a lofty, self-satisfied way, jarring to the feelings of the patient, relatives, and physician. She is intolerant of suggestions and perverse in her own course, and often implies or says that she knows more than the doctor. She does her duties in a routine manner, grudgingly adapts herself to new and varying requirements, and tries to give the impression that she is a superior being. Her austerity, the absence of any mildness in her disposition, and her obtrusive self-reliance, make her an object of dread, and through her the trained nurse's calling is brought into disrepute.

These examples which I have given you of the errors of nurses may serve as danger-signals, consequently they should be avoided by you, since they will inevitably impair if not destroy your usefulness. Think well, therefore, of the lessons which these cases teach, and apply them to your conduct. With these drawbacks to your success in mind, what further must you do when you assume the duty of a private nurse? After your installment don't try to revolutionize the household, and don't indulge in violent innovations. If

changes are necessary, lead up to them gently, in a suggestive rather than in a firm manner. Thus, in performing your duties in a correct and unostentatious way, you will win the confidence and esteem of the patient and relatives, and then your course is clear.

Be observant of ways of the household and endeavor to create as little friction as possible. Bring your tact, prudence, and common sense to guide you in your relations with the patient, the relatives, and the servants. Be mild and gentle, not brusque in your ministrations, and constantly cultivate a delicate touch. While in their distress and suffering you should be tender and sympathetic, don't go beyond the bounds into the maudlin. Try to be firm, kind, patient, and good-tempered under all circumstances, even when your patient is petulant or unreasonable. Maintain your position always by firmness mixed with compassion and kindness. Be orderly, thorough, systematic, and prompt in the discharge of your duties. Never procrastinate, for the habit increases as you grow older. Lend your best efforts to make the sick-room cheery and attractive, and hide from view all evidences of illness, such as medicines, instruments, etc. Be careful that the ventilation is perfect and unattended with injury to the patient. Study to perform the various duties upon the person of the patient in the most delicate and least annoying manner, and administer the medicines in a way as pleasant and as little repugnant as possible. Don't forget the priceless lessons in antisepsis which you have learned in your maternity service; expand and elaborate upon them as your cases require, and you will confer a great boon upon the patient, the relatives, and the physician. Attend to no cases in a routine manner; cultivate your minds and senses by study, observation, and reading. Should emergencies arise, keep cool, act promptly according to the dictates of common sense and education, and

wait till help comes. Cultivate a serious but not dismal demeanor; never be exuberant or flippant, but rather bright and hopeful, and carefully avoid familiarity. Never, by word, deed, insinuation, or implication, be disloyal to the attending physician. Assiduous as you should be in your professional work, you should remember that you owe solemn duties to yourselves. Do not, in your zeal and ambition, attempt to do more than is proper; be careful of your health and husband your strength. Work during your allotted hours, and then rest, and you will do more in the long run than you would if you allowed your sympathies to sway you and undertook to do extra duty. Preserve in future the neatness and simplicity of dress which are peculiar to the hospital; it is pleasing to the eye and cheering to the heart. Take every opportunity for fresh air and exercise, and be regular at your hours for meals. By so doing you will be better fitted to pass through the ordeals which will often be your lot.

In this hospital you have ministered to the wants and sufferings of the poor and the lowly; you graduate from a school of mental and moral training; your surroundings have been those which "tend to elevate the thoughts, temper the feelings, and touch the heart."

Go forth, then, and prove yourselves worthy of your noble calling. Remember that you are the handmaidens of charity and mercy, which "droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven, upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed. It blesseth him that gives and him that takes."







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